

THE LOS ANGELES HIGH SCHOOL

A brief statement of the condition of the public schools in Los Angeles before the establishment of the High School is really a part of the history of the High School.

I arrived in Los Angeles on November 15, 1869. I attended the only school for boys in the city, beginning the first week of January next succeeding. There were two schoolhouses, one on the northeast corner of Second and Spring Streets, where the girls of the city attended, and the other on Bath Street, near its junction with Alameda. The latter was a two-story brick building. The second story was for the boys and the first floor was given up to the girls, most of the pupils being of native population. Miss Mary E. Hoyt was the principal of the school on Second and Spring. Miss Madegan taught the girls at the Bath Street school and Dr. T. H. Rose taught the boys. Bath Street paralleled what is now Olvera Street where the Mexican Village is located. There were about forty-five pupils in the boys department, of whom at least twenty-five bore Spanish names. The remainder were Americans. There was no grading of classes.

During the year 1871 the first teachers institute ever held in Los Angeles was held in our schoolhouse. Dr. Rose had been elected as a presidential elector in the Grant campaign and was scheduled to go on to Washington in the performance of

his electoral duties. At this first institute he made a strong plea for the establishment of a high school. It had its effect in that a committee of citizens went before the legislature in session at Sacramento and had an act passed authorizing this city to issue bonds in the amount of \$20,000 for the purpose of constructing a high school building. The bonds carried and with that money a high school building was erected at the corner of Temple and New High streets.

In 1873, Dr. W. T. Lucky, who had been the superintendent of the Normal School at San Jose, accepted the position as the first superintendent of the high school. The building was completed in 1873. Thus began the Los Angeles High School. It might be interesting to note at this time that this first teachers institute was held in our schoolhouse on Bath Street notwithstanding the fact that the Second and Spring Street school building was much larger. The reason given was that the Spring Street school was too far out of town. It should be borne in mind that the pueblo of Los Angeles was built around and in the vicinity of the Catholic Church opposite the Plaza. There were a few stores on Main Street down as far as Second Street. There were a few residences between Main Street and Fort Street (now Broadway) about as far as Third Street.

Dr. Lucky evidently thought that in the organization of the new high school it should be divided into classes. I have never known who assisted him, for he was a newcomer, nor upon what basis they made the selection, but it eventuated in seven of us being designated as the senior class and the remainder divided into two lower classes. The seven who were selected as seniors were five girls and two boys, whose names are as follows: Jessie Peel, Lillie Milliken, Mary Thomas, Addie Gates, Yda Addis, Henry Leck and Henry W. O'Melveny.

Apart from the room allotted to the two lower classes was a small room which I think had been intended as an office for the superintendent, but Dr. Lucky gave that up to the senior class. We had perfect liberty to converse with each other during school hours, but were cautioned against making too much noise and were put upon our honor. It worked all right. Most of our time was devoted to individual study, but we could converse upon points that might arise in our studies, or even other matters which were social in their character. This was in 1873.

As I have said, the building was situated on the southeast corner of Temple and New High streets. A wooden stairway led from New High Street up to the building and another led up from Temple Street. A certain portion of the top of the hill had been graded away to allow for the erection of this school building, and there was not much room left. Most of the

students went home for lunch because their homes were not far away. I lived at the corner of Second and Fort (Broadway). Fort Street did not run beyond First Street at the beginning, but the City Council opened the street clear to Temple Street for the accommodation of the students.

I cannot remember very well what textbooks we studied. I know we advanced each year, - for instance, in our first year we studied Algebra, in the second year Geometry, and in the third year Trigonometry. That is as far as we got in Mathematics. Among our textbooks were Steele's Fourteen Weeks in Chemistry, Upham Mental Philosophy, and a textbook on Physiology, also United States History. Miss Emma Hawks became assistant to Dr. Lucky and she was the first Vassar graduate to come to Los Angeles.

Owing to the limited area of the school grounds, we could not play many games, but I think we did play Prisoner's Base and Football. To play football we went down to Temple Street. The football was a canvas covered sphere - not like the footballs now in use. Whichever side happened to be down towards Main Street were at a disadvantage as against those who were on Fort Street, as there was quite a slope at that point. We played real football - no passing or tackling - whoever had the ball had to kick it. Later on Mr. C. H. Kimball succeeded Dr. Lucky as superintendent, and he, being a graduate of Annapolis and having been in the Navy, put us through a drill during recess.

So many of us owned riding horses that on Saturdays we would go to the hills and play 'robbers and police', all on horseback. This gave us additional exercise to that which we obtained on the cramped quarters of the school grounds.

Before Dr. Lucky took charge we had Mr. A. G. Brown as principal. He was the professor of Latin and Greek in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There were a great many southern people in Los Angeles at that time, because after the close of the Civil War they came west by the southern route to Los Angeles. I think it was through their influence that Professor Brown was selected. He looked like a Roman senator. He had been teaching Latin and Greek for so many years that he did not know how to teach anything else, so he transformed all our studies into the classics. This created a great deal of opposition among the parents, who thought their children should learn English and not Latin or Greek. So, at the end of his term Professor Brown was incontinently discharged. He was succeeded by Dr. Lucky, whom I have mentioned above. Dr. Lucky in turn was succeeded by Mr. C. H. Kimball.

There is one incident which I still remember. After Mr. Kimball was in charge a flag pole was erected in front of the school building and it was proposed to have a sort of celebration when the flag would be unfurled. Mr. Kimball, having been a naval officer, knew all about ropes and knots, and about flying the flag. In some manner he tucked the flag into a kind of basket that was filled with rose petals and had

knotted the ropes in such a manner that when the flag was unfurled at the top of the pole the rope would be pulled, unknitting it, and there would be a shower of petals. So the flag was raised to the top, the rope was pulled to release the petals, but the knot did not become untied and Mr. Kimball was in a great state of mind. It was thought that by reason of his knowledge of nautical matters the ceremony would go through as planned. He was very much provoked. He lowered the basket, readjusted the ropes, raised it to the top again and then the knot was undone and the flower petals floated out in the breeze and were showered on the spectators below.

Then finally the night of our graduation arrived on May 28, 1875. The graduation exercises were held in Turn-Verein Hall, on Spring Street between Second and Third. Its size enabled it to hold a larger audience than any other building in the city. It is needless to say that it was a very exciting time to us. The audience filled the seating capacity. I have before me a copy of the program printed for that occasion. I will quote the list of speakers, and their subjects, as follows:

Salutatory.....	Henry W. O'Melveny
Altars of Sacrifice....	Jessie Peel
Study, its Incentives and Rewards....	Addie Gates
Path-finders.....	Henry Leck
Dreams.....	Yda Addis
Heroes of Peace.....	Lillie Milliken
Oratory.....	Henry W. O'Melveny
Worth and Wealth.....	Mary Thomas
VALEDICTORY.....	Jessie Peel
Address to the Graduates.....	W.T. Lucky, Principal.

It was with some degree of sadness that we realized that our school-day life at home was over.

From my seat near a window in the little room in which the senior class met I could see, looking toward the east, the Los Angeles River running along the bluff under Boyle Heights. Between the river and Los Angeles Street there was nothing but vineyards and a few orange orchards. It was country all the way up to Los Angeles Street. We could see the Sierra Madre Mountains and the flat roofed adobe houses in what we then called Sonora Town. All the roofs in Sonora Town were flat and were covered with brea. Directly below us in front was the Court House, surmounted by a cupola holding the town clock. It was a strange thing that although that clock had four sides, each facing in a different direction, the hands of none of the faces told the same time as the others. But when it struck the hours it had a loud resounding tone which could be heard all over the city, particularly during the night.

Immediately beneath us was the county jail, the grounds of which faced Spring Street. There was a one-story adobe house and it housed the city government-- the council and city

officials had their offices in it.

At the corner of Temple and New High Streets was the St. Athanias Church, a Protestant Episcopal Church established by the southern people who came here between 1855 and 1865. It was the only Protestant church in the city.

The sketchy picture I have given you shows how far the High School has traveled in the subsequent years.

Our class was a pioneer class because it was the product of the pioneer period. Los Angeles in 1870 had a population of 5400, and I would say that 3500 of the inhabitants were of Mexican origin. Los Angeles was essentially a Mexican pueblo. It speaks well for the American citizens that they determined to have a High School and they voted for the \$20,000 bond issue, which was to be applied to that purpose. It was a crude age, and crudity was reflected in our then educational system. No libraries, textbooks of a simple character; so short of teachers that our class was left to develop almost on its own individual efforts. The population was about one-third American. Even this scant fractional proportion was largely composed of a turbulent element. The merchants, doctors, lawyers, Catholic clergy and one Protestant minister, comprised but a small proportion of the American element. There were the teamsters who drove ten and twelve mule teams from Los Angeles to points in Nevada, Arizona and even to Salt Lake City,

and they were a turbulent crowd. There were saloonkeepers in plenty; criminals, bandits and horse thieves not amenable to law and order. For example, opposite the Temple Street entrance of the school was the very gate upon the crossbars of which Lachenais was lynched. Looking toward the east was the county jail where, the night after the Chinese riot, I saw eleven Chinese lying on a canvas on the ground, who had been lynched the night before. Not long after that that jail held the bandit Vasquez, who had been captured but not killed, out near Hollywood.

But in spite of this, the deep-seated realization that education was the safeguard of America impelled the establishment of the High School.

I still cherish the memory of those days, when I could sit in my corner of the High School room and look at the country to the east. After heavy winter rains the Los Angeles River was visible for some miles, shining like a silver thread as it wended its way under the bluffs of Boyle Heights. How restlessly I waited for the old Town Clock to clang out its four strokes which would end the school day. Those days when there was no Boyle Heights, no Pasadena, no Pomona, no Santa Monica, no Hollywood. Those days when in the city itself Hill Street was but a line on the map and a foot trail on the ground. I often wonder whether we

are any happier now than in those primitive days when life was smoother and school days were simpler and friendships easier to maintain.